SATURDAY EVENING POST
July 31, 1965

ORG 1: Mafia
CIA 5-03,2
PERS: Davidson, Bill

THE MAFIA CAN'T CRACK LOS ANGELES

While other major U.S. cities writhe in the grip of the powerful crime syndicate, Los Angeles keeps the mobsters at bay. Police across the nation are rushing to copy the techniques that have stopped the Mafia.

By BILL DAVIDSON

For all their precautions and attempts at secrecy, the three travelers from Chicago might have been CIA agents. First they gave false names when they bought their plane tickets—"Michael Mancuso," "S. Whate," and "S. Man"—and then they boarded the airliner separately. At International Airport in Los Angeles three hours later, they were quietly met by two other men, and all five drove in a large black car to Perino's Restaurant for a dinner conference. They returned to the airport and, as they stepped from the car, they were stopped by officers of the Intelligence Division of the Los Angeles Police Department; the officers had been watching the three Chicagoans from the moment they arrived in Los Angeles. The encounter took place several years ago. At that time, "S. Man," better known as Tony Accardo, was boss of the

Continued

powerful Chicago Mafia organization. "Michael Mancuso" was Sam Giancana, soon to become Accardo's successor as overlord of the Chicago mob. "S. Whate" was Accardo's doctor. The two men who met and conferred with the three were the late Frank (Strongy) Ferrara, then the underboss in charge of the Mafia's gambling operations in Chicago, and the notorious Anthony Pinelli, known to the L.A. police as the Chicago mob's resident agent in California and today a fugitive from justice for federal-income-tax evasion.

The five men were not arrested by the intelligence agents; they were merely taken in for questioning. When the questions were over, the intelligence men called in the press. The three visitors begged to be let go without publicity, offering to board the first plane to *any* destination. Giancana, after a tantrum, observed with resignation, "Now that everyone will know I'm here, I can't do any business, so I might just as well go home." Accardo's remark was more revealing. "I'm just passing through," he said as he pleaded not to be exposed to the press. "Believe me, I don't want no part of Los Angeles."

One of the strangest of the strange circumstances surrounding the Mafia in the United States is that most of its members similarly "want no part of Los Angeles." Although they operate freely in nearly every other major American metropolis, they have labeled Los Angeles a no-man's-land. With its wealthy and expanding population, the nation's third largest city would seem fertile territory for the Mafia's illicit operations in narcotics, prostitution, gambling, usury, mayhem and murder, but as ex-Mafia member Joe Valachi sadly reported to the McClellan Committee, "We have only a very weak family out there." Since the 1940's, when the city was in the iron grip of Mafia boss Jack Dragna and his allies, Bugsy Siegel and Mickey Cohen, Los Angeles has had only one authentic gangland murder (compared with an average of 50 a year in Chicago), and all the Mafia's attempts to establish a stronghold in the rich province have failed.

In 1962, for example, the Gallo mob in Brooklyn, harassed by the New York police and by the rival Profaci gang, began to think about moving en masse to a less perilous environment and, with that in mind, sent a probing mission to Los Angeles. The advance men were Louis (Lefty) Castiglione and Michael (Rizzi) Rizzitello, both of whom had long criminal records in New York. When they arrived in Los Angeles, they checked in with Nick Licata, one of the three men considered to be the heads of the weak Los Angeles family of the Mafia, and got Licata's permission to operate. Somewhere along the way, they also picked up a local Mafioso, Anthony Zurica.

The Castiglione-Rizzitello-Zurica operation was crude. "In fact," says Inspector of Detectives Henry Kerr, "it was *so* rudimentary that we could only conclude they were testing our defenses." At about two A.M. on a Sunday or Monday morning they would enter a bar whose cash register was overflowing with money from the weekend business. They would pistol-whip the cashier in full view of the staff and patrons, then warn them not to talk to the police on pain of revenge from the rest of the Gallo mob. They were easily identified by the Intelligence Division of the Los Angeles police and promptly arrested.

Then came the typical Eastern Mafia tactics; witnesses were relentlessly intimidated (some had wheels fall off their cars), and a high-priced lawyer was flown in from New York to handle the cases. In Los Angeles, however, the Mafia tactics failed to work: On November 28, 1962, all three mobsters were given life sentences—punishments far more severe than the New Yorkers had ever expected—and the Gallo mob has not been heard from in Southern California since. Experts believe the Mafia deliberately sacrificed Castiglione, Rizzitello and Zurica just to see what the reaction of Los Angeles law-enforcement authorities would be.

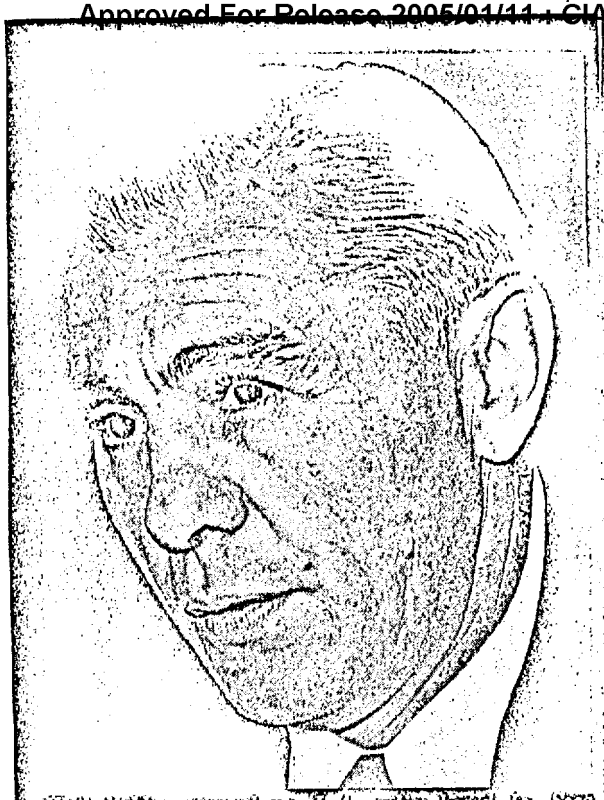
The reaction of the authorities has been consistently the same for more than a decade, and one Mafia intrusion after another has been rebuffed. Certainly there is crime in Los Angeles, but it is not of the cancerous Chicago-New York-Cleveland Cosa Nostra type; certainly there are individual Mafia members living in the Los Angeles area, but they have not been able to organize the kind of massive crime complex that can take over as the second government of a city. The principal reason is that Los Angeles has an extraordinary police department; former Attorney General Robert Kennedy once described it to me as "probably the finest and most modern in the United States, if not in the world."

Unlike other cities—many of which are only now beginning to copy its methods—Los Angeles conducts its operations against the Mafia like a full-scale war. The key echelon in the war is the police department's 50-man Intelligence Division. On the wall behind its commander's desk is a large map of Sicily, homeland of the Mafia. Down the hall is a sprawling chart-filled room that looks like an Army command post, with drawings of Mafia family trees from all over the United States, volume after volume on the history of the Mafia in Europe and in America, and files crammed with such pinpointed facts as "Joe Sica observed in conversation with Angelo Polizzi in parking lot of Santa Anita racetrack," with cross-references to similar previous conversations.

The Intelligence Division knows the precise whereabouts of every Mafia member in Southern California, and what he is doing at almost any given time. It uses round-the-clock surveillance, electronic devices, informers and undercover agents to keep track of its foe. Through a remarkable organization called L.E.I.U. (Law Enforcement Intelligence Units), which it helped create, it has trusted police specialists all over the United States who tip it off whenever a Mafia member from another area heads for California; only rarely does it fail to spot a Mafioso the moment he sets foot in the forbidden territory. The Intelligence Division even has a "hot line" from Mafia-ridden Las Vegas, one hour away by plane, and it keeps a permanent reception committee at the airport meeting all airliners from Vegas.

Intelligence Division officers are almost always on hand any time there is an opportunity to harass a visiting or resident Mafioso. In 1959, for example, Philadelphia's Blinky Palermo was waiting for a plane at the Los Angeles airport; he wandered over to a newsstand, and, his larcenous nature being what it is, he walked off without paying for 80 cents' worth of candy and papers. Suddenly two Intelligence officers appeared and ar-

Continued



With hidden microphone, L.A. police heard Joe Sica (above) threaten victim. Sica got two-year jail sentence.

To harass Philadelphia's Blinky Palermo, L.A. cops jailed him for stealing 80 cents' worth of candy, papers.

rested him for petty theft. Palermo, who was totally unused to such treatment by the police back home, threatened and blustered. He then called a movie-actor friend to bail him out. "Who made the pinch?" asked the actor. "Some guys from what they call the Intelligence Division," said Blinky. "Oh, no!" said the actor with finality, and Palermo had to stay in a cell until he could raise his bail elsewhere.

In the same year, the Intelligence Division was keeping an eye on another distinguished Mafia visitor, Gus Alex, identified in congressional testimony as an under-boss in charge of vice in downtown Chicago. Alex had been arrested more than 100 times in Chicago, but for some peculiar reason there was not a single police-identification photograph on him in existence. "We must rectify *that*," Lt. Marion Phillips of Los Angeles Intelligence told his men. "Let's see what we have in the file on him." The officers searched the file, and they came up with a five-year-old Los Angeles traffic ticket that Alex had ignored on a previous visit. Within an hour or so, Sgts. Robert Devin and William Unland had obtained a warrant for Alex's arrest on the $10 violation. The warrant gave them the authority to enter the Los Angeles home of Alex's mother-in-law, and there they found the dapper thug hiding in a closet behind a rack of women's clothes. They took Alex to police headquarters and made a mug shot, copies of which

Continued

Frankie Carbo, Mafia boss from Miami, met grim fate in Los Angeles when police nailed him for extortion.

now have been added to every police-identification file in the United States.

Los Angeles' internationally famous Police Chief William H. Parker (often mentioned as a candidate to succeed J. Edgar Hoover as director of the FBI) describes his war against the Mafia in vivid terms. "The Intelligence Division," he says, "is the spearhead of my offensive forces. They jab and probe and do the reconnaissance, and they harass the enemy's flanks. When it comes time to deliver a major blow to the enemy, they lead the attack." Such a major blow was delivered in 1959. It eliminated one of the top Mafia figures in Los Angeles and shook the syndicate in strongholds as far away as Miami and Philadelphia.

The opportunity for a coup arose when Frankie Carbo, the Mafia's unofficial czar of boxing, tried to get a "piece" of a new welterweight champion, Don Jordan. Carbo agreed with Los Angeles boxing promoter Jackie Leonard that the "piece" would be 15 percent. But Leonard had neglected to get the agreement of Jordan's managers, Don Nesseth and Jackie McCoy. They refused to have any part of the deal arranged by Leonard, saying he had no right to speak for them, and this put Leonard on the spot with Carbo.

First Carbo phoned Leonard from his headquarters in Miami, telling him, "You're going to be hurt. And when I mean hurt, I mean dead." Then there was a series of meetings in Los Angeles at which the recalcitrant promoter and managers were intimidated by Carbo's emissaries, headed by Mafia hoodlum Blinky Palermo of Philadelphia. At one of the meetings, a Los Angeles Mafia "enforcer" named Joe Sica made some threats. This was unfortunate for Sica and the other Carbo emissaries, because both Leonard and his office had been wired with miniature radio transmitters by electronics experts of the Intelligence Division; every word of the conversation was being tape-recorded a block or so away. Included in the recorded dialogue was a remarkable description of Mafia mayhem technique, reported here verbatim: "See what they do? They use a water pipe, see? You know, regular lead water pipe. Lead pipe. And about that short. About that thick. And they just get an ordinary piece of newspaper, see? Newspaper don't show fingerprints. Then they take it and they wrap it up just in the newspaper, see? And you're sitting in a crowd. And they try to give you two bats, and they kill you with two if they can. But they whack you twice and split your skull and knock you unconscious. And they just drop the pipe wrapped in the newspaper and in the crowd nobody knows who did it."

This evidence and much more was turned over to the FBI by the Intelligence Division, and the case was heard in Federal court in 1961. It resulted in a disaster for the national Mafia organization. Carbo, immune to justice for more than two decades, received a 25-year sentence (for extortion and conspiracy), Joe Sica, the "enforcer" who was also the Los Angeles *caporegima*, or under-boss, got 20 years. Palermo was put away for 15. The case against Louis Tom Dragna, also accused in the intimidation, was weaker, and his five-year term was eventually reversed on appeal.

The Intelligence Division, in the main, is made up of men who have already proved themselves in other branches of the police department. Most of them are [illegible]

Chicago's Gus Alex was often arrested, never photographed; then Los Angeles police made these, his first "mug shots."

who until very recently headed the division, was an economics major at the University of Southern California, got a B.S. in public administration and took two years of graduate studies. Still, no matter what a man's education or experience, it takes about a year to train him properly to be an Intelligence Division agent. He must not only acquire specialized knowledge in a wide number of fields but learn undercover techniques and develop underworld informants.

"The Mafia is afraid of our department," Chief Parker says. "That's why we have so little trouble with them. But it's not only our offensive arm, the Intelligence Division, that frightens them. It's also our *defensive* arm, the Bureau of Internal Affairs. It's a historical fact that the Mafia cannot operate in a city unless they are in league with corrupt policemen who look the other way and let them function. It's the job of the Bureau of Internal Affairs to make sure that we have no corrupt policemen—and they do their job well. With any group of 5,000 men you're bound to get a bad apple every once in a while, and we *do* get them. But we find them, and we deal with them, and the Mafia has learned time and time again that there's no way of dealing with *us*."

Not long ago, for example, the Bureau of Internal Affairs—called "the headhunter detail" by the other cops—uncovered an ingenious plot which, if it had succeeded, could have subverted the entire police department. On February 15, 1964, a policeman on the Administrative Vice Squad named Henry De Maddalena took his young partner, Joseph Gunn, aside and proposed that Gunn take part in a scheme to protect a group of bookies. For this, De Maddalena said, Gunn would be paid $200 on the 15th of every month. He gave Gunn a $50 bill as a token of good faith and explained that all he had to do was to sound a warning by calling a series of private telephone numbers whenever the protected bookies were about to be raided. This is the exact method used for years by Mafia-police alliances in such cities as Chicago and New Orleans.

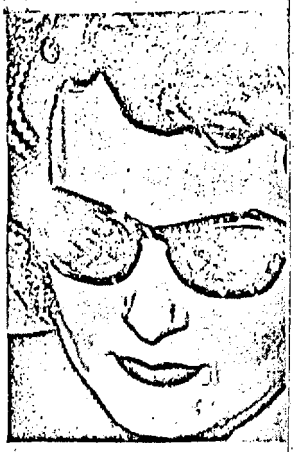
Both De Maddalena and Gunn are of Sicilian extraction, but Gunn was shocked by the proposal. He told De Maddalena he'd think about it, then went directly to his commanding officer and told him the story. Almost immediately he was whisked in to see Capt. Sidney Mills, the head of the Bureau of Internal Affairs. That same day Captain Mills [illegible]

Continued

ture tape recorder. He ordered Gunn to return to De Maddalena and pretend to go along with the plan, while with the help of the hidden tape recorder the secret agents of the bureau developed the evidence. The mobsters had researched the police department thoroughly and knew exactly where it was vulnerable. Their plan was to corrupt just one key man in each of five key offices, including both Intelligence and Internal Affairs. "With those five men," Chief Parker told me, "they would have controlled the whole department."

But again Los Angeles' defenses held. The penetration had not gone beyond two of the five offices—Administrative Vice and Central Vice—when Mills's men closed in and made their arrests. With Officer Gunn as the principal witness, De Maddalena was indicted, along with Sgt. Peter E. Stafford of Central Vice and several bookies. All were convicted, and Stafford's commanding officer was dismissed from the force on charges of neglect of duty for not knowing what was going on.

It was not always thus. As recently as 15 years ago Los Angeles was just as Mafia-ridden as any of the big Eastern cities, and its police department was just as thoroughly infiltrated. Mafia members from Sicily were identified in Los Angeles as early as 1906, just a few years after the main Mafia migration into the Eastern United States. In Southern California their initial effort was an attempt to take over the fruit-and-vegetable business—by murder and violence—from law-abiding Italian and Sicilian immigrants. The mob soon expanded into what was to become its main business—extortion. And with the arrival of Prohibition, the Los Angeles "family" of the Mafia moved into the lucrative business of bootlegging.



Brenda Allen, a madam, caused 1949 police scandal.

In the '30's, when the Mafia was not yet strong enough to control organized crime from coast-to-coast, it formed alliances with such powerful Jewish mobsters as Louis (Lepke) Buchalter, the head of Murder, Incorporated, in New York. To strengthen the Mafia organization in Los Angeles, Buchalter and New York Mafia boss Charles (Lucky) Luciano sent out Bugsy Siegel, an erratic but effective executive, to work with the local Mafia head, Jack Dragna. Under the Siegel-Dragna leadership, Los Angeles crime moved into its golden era. Gambling palaces flourished, and gambling ships stood off the coast; nearly all bars and nightclubs were under firm mob control; relays of mob-owned prostitutes moved up and down the West Coast; and marijuana and heroin poured in freely from Tijuana, Mexico. The police were bribed to look the other way. Siegel was murdered on June 20, 1947, but the alliance with Mafia boss Dragna continued through Siegel's aide, Mickey Cohen.

Jack Dragna ruled city for Mafia in "bad old days."

Two years later, however, the mobsters ran into trouble. They had depended heavily on the cooperation of the Los Angeles police, but in 1949 two scandals hit the police department. First, it was discovered that some high-ranking police officials were in league with the notorious madam, Brenda Allen; then came the revelation that members of the Gangster Squad, who were supposed to be combating the mob, were having friendly dinners with Mickey Cohen in expensive restaurants and night clubs, with Cohen graciously picking up the check. The public outcry over these disclosures resulted in the removal of C. B. Horrall as police chief and the appointment of a tough retired Marine Corps general, William A. Worton, to clean up the mess.

General Worton got rid of all of the obvious bad eggs in the department. He was prevented by civil-service law from serving more than a year as chief, however, and he began to look around for a successor. Wherever he went he heard about a rebellious, cantankerous, scrupulously honest inspector named William H. Parker. Then in his early 40's, Parker had refused to knuckle under to the sometimes questionable practices of his superiors, and he would go out into the street and arrest prostitutes and hoodlums himself if his men seemed to be shirking their duty. Parker had joined the Los Angeles police force in 1927 and had earned his law degree from the Los Angeles College of Law by studying at night. In World War II, General Dwight D. Eisenhower had put Parker in charge of developing the police-and-prisons plan for the European invasion. After the war, Parker had set up democratic police systems for the cities of Munich and Frankfort.

General Worton jumped Parker over the heads of several other police officials and made him deputy chief. During Worton's one-year tenure, Deputy Chief Parker founded the Bureau of Internal Affairs and revitalized the old Gangster Squad into the elite force now known as the Intelligence Division. On August 9, 1950, Parker became chief. He has held the job ever since, through several changes of city administration. "Chief Parker is hard-headed and tough to get along with," says the present mayor, Samuel Yorty, "and he still steps on a lot of people's toes, but he's the best cop in the world."

From the moment Parker took office as chief of police, the Mafia's influence in Southern California began to dissolve. Today its resident members are just a scruffy band whose structure is weak. They

Continued

have no crime organization of their own and seem to be relegated to doing favors locally—such as purchasing properties or intimidating people—for Mafia bosses in other cities. The worst that is suspected of the Los Angeles Mafia is that it perhaps uses the national organization's communications and transportation facilities to move money from illegal activities out of the city for these other organized gangs, for a fee.

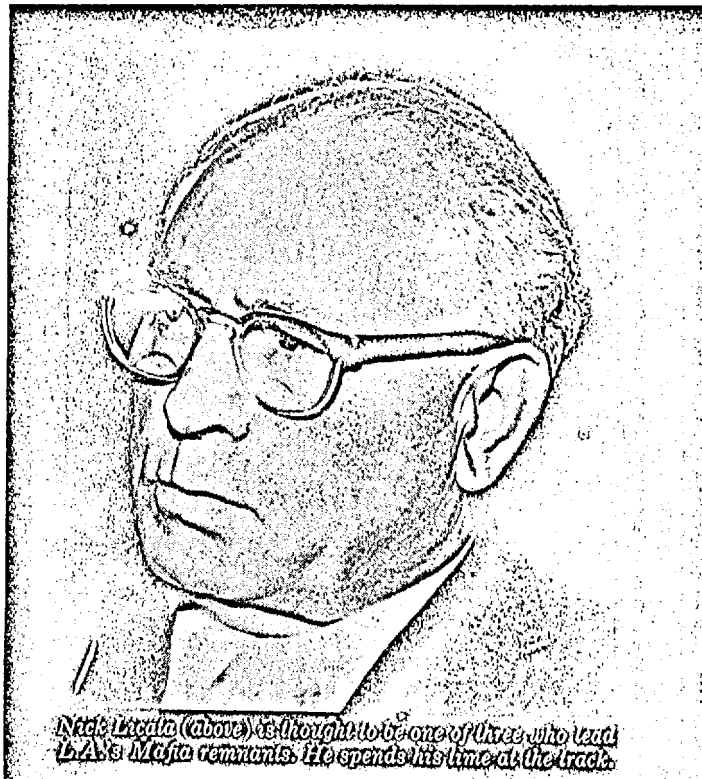
There is no Mafia strong man in Los Angeles. The Intelligence Division believes that the leadership of the Mafia "family" in the city is split up among three men. The first is Frank Desimone, a 55-year-old bachelor who wears rimless glasses. Desimone is an attorney who does not practice and has no visible means of support. He was one of two Los Angeles delegates to the 1957 Mafia Grand Council meeting at Apalachin (the other delegate, Simone Scozzari, has since been deported to Sicily), and he was among those arrested by the New York State Police. He served four months in jail for avoiding a grand jury subpoena concerning the Apalachin meeting, and later he was given a four-year sentence on a charge of conspiracy to obstruct justice. Like all the other convictions in this case, Desimone's was later reversed.

The Intelligence Division believes Desimone is a "super errand boy for the national Mafia in Los Angeles" and also the legal adviser for the local mob. He frequently makes mysterious trips to Mexico. Although he has no known income, he lives well. He drives a white Cadillac and has a $35,000 home in suburban Downey, Calif.

The second member of the Los Angeles Mafia leadership triumvirate is believed to be Nick Licata. Originally a Mafia transferee from Detroit, Licata, now about 70, still retains strong ties with the Eastern "families." Originally Licata ran gambling enterprises for the late Los Angeles boss, Jack Dragna, and in 1951 he was arrested in connection with the Mafia murder of Tony Trombino and Tony Brancato, who had committed the indiscretion of holding up one of the mob's gambling casinos in Las Vegas. He was acquitted.

Today Licata lives on the income from several apartment houses he owns and from legitimate businesses he has infiltrated. He spends most of his time at the racetrack, where he meets constantly with lesser Mafia members and gives them orders. Licata is characterized by the Intelligence Division as "one of the big ones, a decision maker." He was positively identified as a leader by Joseph Valachi before the McClellan Committee.

The third member of the Los Angeles ruling group, Louis Tom Dragna, was also known to Valachi. Six feet tall and 190 pounds, the 44-year-old Louis Tom is a nephew of boss Jack Dragna, who died peacefully in bed shortly after Chief Parker took over. Louis Tom's criminal record includes arrests for burglary, counterfeiting and conspiracy to commit murder. He now owns two non-union dress manufacturing companies in the Los Angeles area, is a member of two golf clubs, and frequents the fashionable Perino's Restaurant. The Intelligence Division calls Dragna "the man who settles disputes in the mob."



Nick Licata (above) is thought to be one of three who lead L.A.'s Mafia remnants. He spends his time at the track.

Second member of three-some is Frank Desimone, a bachelor who lives handsomely but has no visible means of support.

Continued

There are only 32 Mafia members in the Los Angeles area, and this figure includes elderly Mafiosi from other cities who have come to California to retire and die, just like legitimate businessmen. Recently I discussed this sorry collection and its undistinguished leadership with Chief Parker and Inspector Gates, then the chief of Intelligence and now inspector of police. "It looks as if we've won the war," said Gates.

"Don't be too cocky," said Parker. "With these guys you drop your guard, and wham!"

We discussed the fact that Los Angeles' almost total victory had given hope to many other cities in their war against better-entrenched Mafia "families," and that one police department after another was copying Parker's techniques. "Yes," said Gates, whose acting successor as head of Intelligence is Lt. Marion Phillips, "a lot of the Mafia are leaving the United States altogether and the new ones from Sicily are migrating to other countries. The poor Australians are having trouble with them now."

I asked Parker if he expected to be fighting the Mafia for the rest of his life, and he said, "Yes."

"Why?" I asked.

He replied simply, in a tone devoid of melodrama: "Because they are there." □

Louis Tom Dragna, nephew of old boss Jack Dragna, has been called "the man who settles disputes in the mob."